

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BUENOS 07874 031555Z

20

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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R 031430Z DEC 76

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8103

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 7874

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, SEDU, AR

SUBJECT: ARMY FIRES NOTED "HARD-LINE" GENERAL

REF: BA 5150

1. DEPUTY COMMANDER OF FIFTH ARMY CORPS (BAHIA BLANCA), GEN. ADEL EDGARDO VILAS, HAS BEEN RELIEVED FROM ACTIVE DUTY (INTO "DISPONABILIDAD"), A STEP WHICH NORMALLY LEADS TO RETIREMENT. STORY HAS BEEN REPORTED IN PRESS, AND CONFIRMED BY GEN. VILAS HIMSELF. MANNER OF ANNOUNCEMENT WAS UNUSUAL, AND SIGNIFICANT IN THAT ARMY COULD HAVE ACCOMPLISHED SAME THING WITHOUT DRAWING AS MUCH ATTENTION AND SPECULATION AT END OF DECEMBER WHEN NORMAL PROMOTIONS, RETIREMENTS AND JOB CHANGES ARE FORMALLY ANNOUNCED. IT IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED THAT VILAS WAS FIRED IN LARGE PART FOR THE NOTORIETY AND EMBARRASSMENT OF HIS ACTIONS AS AN EXTREME HARD-LINER IN HIS COMMAND, ESPECIALLY THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PURGE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH IN BAHIA BLANCA. IT IS ALSO PROBABLE, OF COURSE, THAT HIS MILITARY RECORD WAS NOT OTHERWISE DISTINGUISHED ENOUGH TO SAVE HIM.

2. REFTTEL REPORTED ON INITIAL STEPS IF VILAS' CAMPAIGN TO LCEAN UP UNIVERSITY IN BAHIA BLANCA IN EARLY AUGUST. IN OCTOBER, FIFTH CORPS ANNOUNCED FORMAL DETENTION OF 18 OR 19 FACULTY OR ADMINISTRATIVE MEMBERS OF UNIVERSITY UNDER STATE OF SIEGE, CHARGED WITH "HAVING BEEN FOUND TO BE INDOCTRINATING AND CORRUPT-  
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PAGE 02 BUENOS 07874 031555Z

ING STUDENTS." FIFTH CORPS PRESS RELEASE AT THAT TIME PROMISED

PUBLIC REPORT GIVING DETAILS OF OFFENSES COMMITTED BY THOSE  
DETAINED. AS OF EARLY DECEMBER, NO SUCH REPORT HAS APPEARED.

3. DIRECTION BEHIND CAMPAIGN AT BAHIA BLANCA WAS CLEARLY AND  
OPENLY THAT OF VILAS WAS NEVER MENTIONED IN CONNECTION WITH EVENTS  
OR REPORTS ON THEM. GEN. VILAS' CAMPAIGN WAS AN EMBARRASSMENT TO  
GOA; IT WILL BE RECALLED THAT HIS INITIAL EFFORT INCLUDED ALLEGA-  
TIONS AGAINST A FORMER RECTOR WHICH BROUGHT THAT INDIVIDUAL FLYING  
BACK FROM ABROAD TO SUCCESSFULLY DEFEND HIMSELF IN COURT, AND  
FORCED THE GOA TO DETAIN FORMER PRESIDENT (AND GENERAL) LANUSSE  
FOR FIVE DAYS FOR PUBLICLY DEFENDING HIS APPOINTMENT OF THE  
FORMER RECTOR.

4. NEW GOA HAS BEEN CONDUCTING RATHER QUIET PURGE OF UNIVERSITIES  
SINCE MARCH 1976 COUP. THIS IS NOTHING NEW; WITH EACH CHANGE OF  
GOVERNMENT OVER LAST DECADES, FROM ONE POLITICAL ORIENTATION TO  
ANOTHER, UNIVERSITIES HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY PURGED. EDUCATION HAS  
SUFFERED ACCORDINGLY. ON OTHER HAND, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT  
UNIVERSITIES HAVE BEEN CENTERS OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM, LEGAL AND  
ILLEGAL. IT IS CONCEDED BY MOST OBSERVERS THAT UNDER PRESENT  
GOA THERE IS AT LEAST SOME OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDY IN THE UNIVER-  
SITIES, HOWEVER POOR THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION BEING OFFERED.  
VILAS' EVIDENT SIN WAS TO DRAW TOO MUCH ATTENTION TO PURGE  
PROCESS, AND TO CARRY IT TO UNACCEPTABLE EXTREMES. IT HAS  
BECOME EVIDENT THAT THERE WAS INSUFFICIENT SUBSTANCE TO HIS  
CHARGES AGAINST ACADEMICS IN BAHIA BLANCA.

5. WE UNDERSTAND THAT VILAS WAS OFFERED CHANCE TO MOVE TO STAFF  
JOB, WITH UNDERSTANDING THAT HE WOULD RETIRE IN COURSE OF TIME.  
HE APPARENTLY CHALLENGED ARMY, IN FORM OF CHIEF OF STAFF VIOLA  
BACKED BY PRES. VIDELA, TO DROP THE AXE OPENLY, AND WAS OBLIGED.  
WHILE IT IS POSSIBLE THAT HE COULD BE GIVEN A NEW JOB, IT IS  
PROBABLE THAT HE WILL BE RETIRED AT END OF YEAR.

6. DISMISSAL OF VILAS, AND CREDIBLY RUMORED PENDING RETIREMENTS  
OF CERTAIN OTHER NOTED EXTREME HARD-LINERS IN ARMY (E.G. BUASSO  
AND MUJICA), POSSIBLY REPRESENTS EVIDENCE OF GREATER CONFIDENCE  
ON PART OF VIDELA-VIOLA GROUP OF RELATIVE MODERATES IN ARMY.  
WE INTERPRET EPISODE AS ENCOURAGING IN TERMS OF POLITICAL  
MODERATION AND INDICATION MODERATES MAY BE PREVAILING OVER AT  
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PAGE 03 BUENOS 07874 031555Z

LEAST THE MORE EXTREME RADICAL RIGHTWING IN THE OFFICER CORPS.  
CREDIBLE SOURCES ARE ALSO REPORTING THAT CORPS COMMANDERS SUAREZ  
MASON AND MENENDEZ, "HARD-LINERS," ARE EXPRESSING STRONG FEELINGS  
OF UNHAPPINESS OVER REMOVAL OF VILAS.  
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